

Transcribed February 20, 2003

**Alaska Dept. of Health & Social Services Commissioner  
Joel Gilbertson's remarks to  
"Alaska Faith-Based And Community Initiative Scoping  
Meeting"  
approx. 10:35 am, Thu. Feb. 20, 2003,  
via teleconference from Juneau to  
Loussac Public Library, Wilda Marston Theater, Anchorage**

Thank you Lt. Governor for taking the time to lead in implementing Gov. Murkowski's Faith-Based Initiative. It's an important effort for the State, and it's an important effort for this Department. I think we have a great opportunity to seize upon efforts in the past and opportunities in the future to greatly improve the quality and level of services provided throughout the state.

As a Department, we stand ready to work with Lt. Governor Leman to build the partnerships and collaborations that we're going to require to meet the needs that exists throughout the state. I firmly believe that individuals in need do not care who is providing these services: they care that the need is being met, and that the services are available. We're working right now on our budget proposals. State resources are finite, budget concerns affect the decisions we make about services delivery, and we all have to work to ensure that we're maximizing resources and that basic needs are being met.

As a department, we are working in coordination with the Lt. Governor to empower organizations, and to provide them technical expertise. We stand ready to hold workshops on applying for state and federal funding, on grant development, on developing successful collaborations, and on establishing volunteer programs. We also want to work to coordinate efforts with all of the faith-based organizations.

One of the things that we're working towards is having a faith-based initiative liaison for every Division in our Department. These liaisons will work to develop regional conferences that bring together state and federal agencies, local departments, community groups, and faith-based organizations throughout the state to discuss how we can target the unmet needs in our communities. The liaison will help groups apply for and use government funds, and identify ways they can collaborate with other organizations who share a common mission and a common goal.

I think there's some confusion about what is and what is not accessible to faith-based organizations. This Department needs to clarify that all faith-based organizations can apply for our grant programs.

This is a unique time in the state of Alaska. We have financial concerns at the State level, but the need for services still exists. One thing we must do is work together to make sure that those needs are being met. The view of who should be providing services and who should be working to provide those services is changing. As a Department, we need to understand that there are a number of individuals and organizations that stand ready to meet needs. They simply need advice, technical expertise, grant writing assistance, and a partner who can help them build coalitions and partnerships. That's what this Department's mission will be. That's what we're going to be doing as our part in this important initiative.

I really appreciate the Lt. Governor taking on this task. I appreciate that our Department will be playing a larger role in the faith-based initiative. Twenty three percent of the top 100 employers in Alaska are nonprofit organizations. There is also a large number of faith-based organizations throughout Anchorage and Fairbanks and throughout the state who stand ready to aid. We're going to need the help of all these organizations, and I look forward to working with each and every one of you to serve the people of Alaska.

Joel Gilbertson, Commissioner